

Tamarama Gully Rediscovered

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Motorists or walkers moving between Bondi Beach and Bronte come across a deep, horseshoe-shaped bay, with Marine Drive separating a surfing beach and grassed picnic area on the east and a steep gully or ravine on the west, known as Tamarama Park. Being quickly passed and more compact, it is less well known than its high-iconic neighbours, a situation this article redresses.

The remarkable natural characteristics of Tamarama Gully were recognized and respected by its first European settlers from the 1840s, until two entrepreneurial entertainment facilities were ruthlessly imposed on the beach end between 1888 and 1911. The first the 'The Royal Aquarium and Pleasure Grounds' captured public imagination and patronage initially, but fizzled out around 1895. A decade later, the land was bought by a Mr William Anderson who created Wonderland City in 1906, modelled on Coney Island entertainment devices. These successive, insensitive developments did considerable harm to Tamarama's natural elements. That period also coincided with the rash of subdivisions all along the Gully edge, with buyers seeking to take advantage of its scenic attraction and views to the ocean. Indeed, so intensive was the development that virtually no viewing platform is now available to the visiting public, except the narrow corridor down Birrell Street to the sea.

The first person to establish a house at the head of the Gully was David Fletcher, first Mayor of Waverley, who built *The Glen* close to the picturesque waterfall in the mid 1870s. Subsequent development and subdivision at the head of the Gully occurred principally as a result of the need for the Fletcher family to provide land and houses for its expanding numbers. Numerous lots were carved out of the Fletcher land-holding by his descendents, regrettably with little regard for the Gully's intrinsic natural beauty and environmental flows. Subsequently, houses of all shapes and sizes crowded around its rim and even on rockbenches partway down the steep Gully slopes. In the early 1920s Waverley Council engineers converted the creek into a stormwater drain, strangling the waterfall and covering over the creek at its base, removing all trace of it.

In this incremental way, the intrinsic natural beauty and historical legacy of the Gully was gradually lost. This article, based on sustained research, appears to be the first serious attempt to rediscover it. Regrettably, lack of such information has resulted in inadequate understanding of the Gully's key values, and consequently insufficient incentive for the State Government to purchase the Gully land even when Waverley Council urged them to do so. Unfortunately, Government — and Council — attention and funds were used up in developing the larger and more glamorous Bronte valley, and then Bondi Beach, leaving Tamarama something of a Cinderella.

For the full research paper: www.aila.org.au/LApapers

Research



Tamarama Gully, Park (bisected by Marine Drive) and Beach from the air, 1976. Source: Waverley Library



Contour plan of Tamarama Gully, showing the jostling of residences around its edge, and how the apartment block adjacent to Birrell St. actually straddles part of the original waterfall. It also shows the absurd original (1840) road reservation of Birrell Street. Source: Waverley Library, overlays by MWA



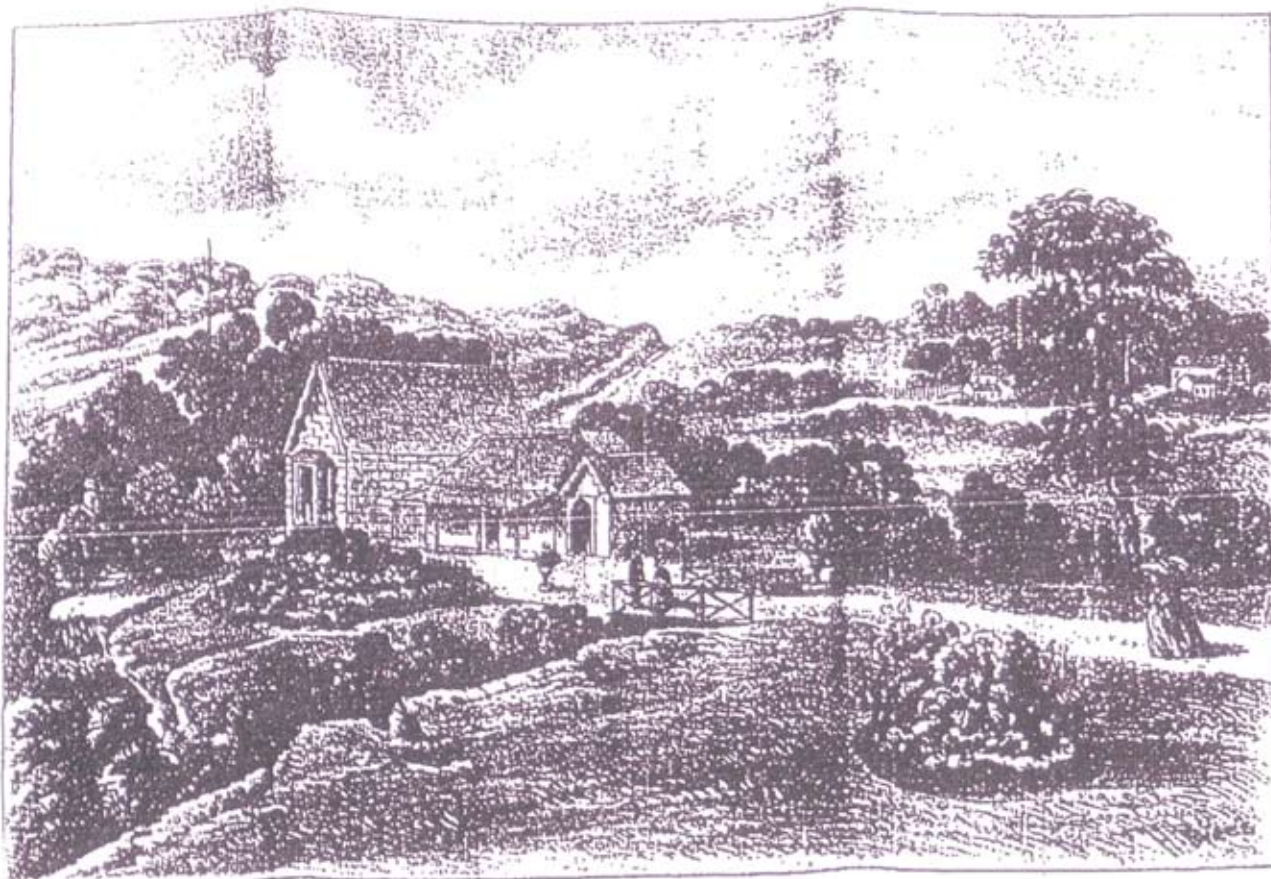
The top of the waterfall with the bridge over it built by David Fletcher, close to his house called *The Glen*. Image: Major W.L. Johnston.



The upper section of the waterfall, taken from the bridge. Image: Major Johnston, held by Waverley's Local Studies Library



The steps and fountains, installed by David Fletcher, c. 1878–80 Source, Mitchell Library

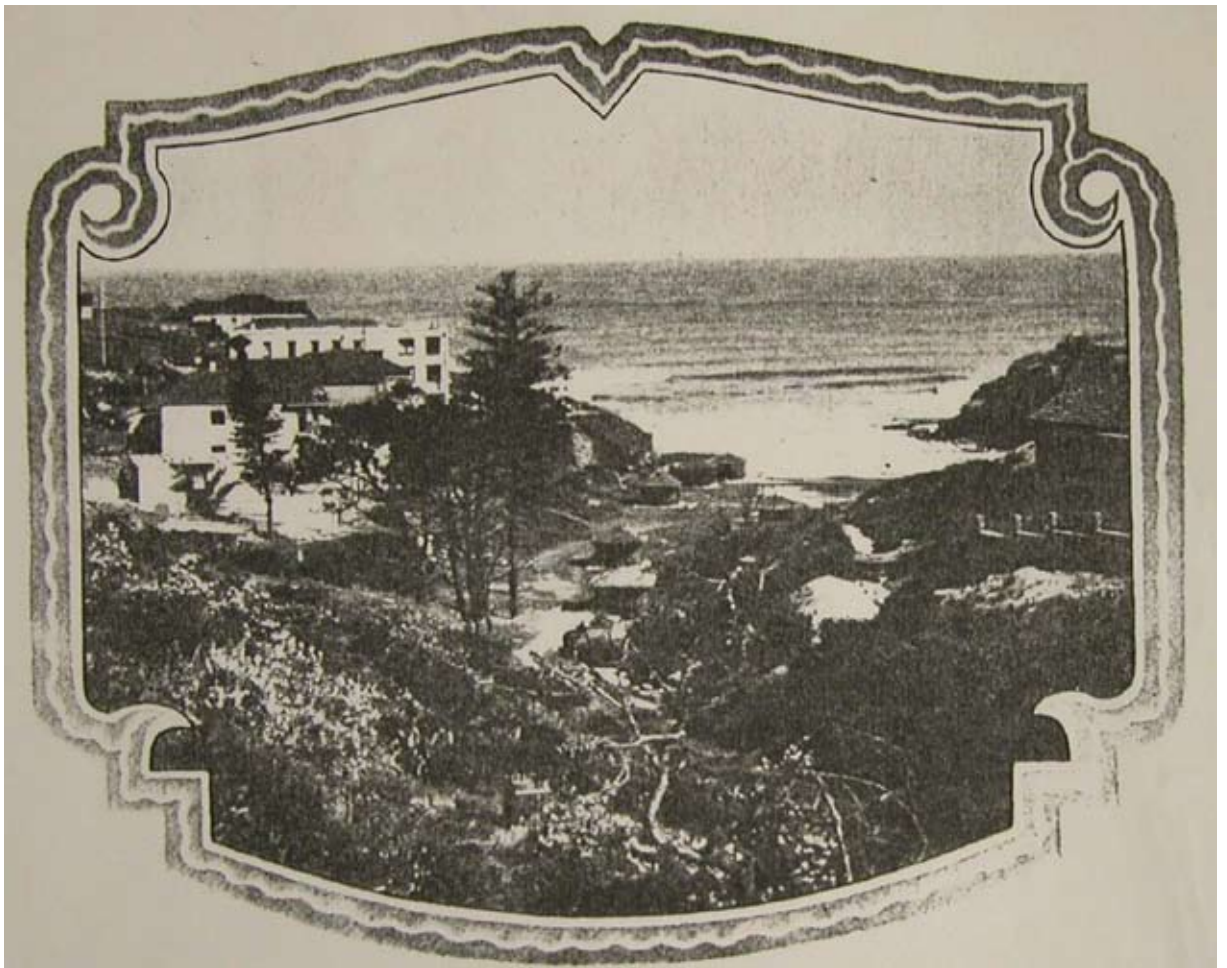


View of the Land.

The Glen, built by David Fletcher, first mayor of Waverley, beside the top of the waterfall in 1876.



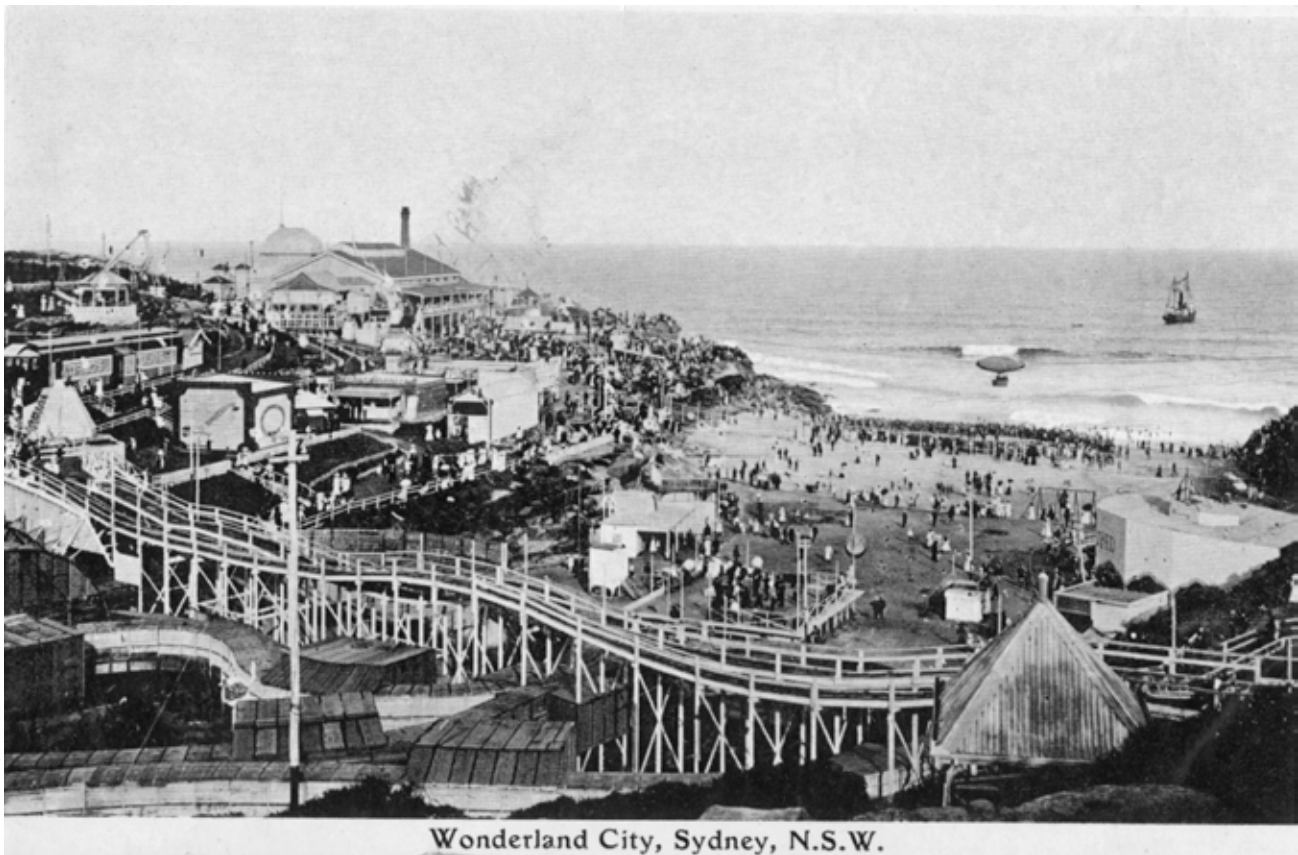
The waterfall, c. 1880, with *The Glen* visible at the top. Source: Waverley Library.



View from the top of the Gully to Tamarama beach.
Source: 'Bondi the Beautiful' 1929, Waverley Library.



View down the waterfall from the apartment block (360 Birrell St.) in 1983. Photograph: Martina Comino



Wonderland City, Sydney, N.S.W.

William Anderson's 'Wonderland City' at Tamarama beach, c. 1908



View looking west up Tamarama Gully from Wonderland City, c. 1908. Fletcher's house The Glen is still visible (top left), but by then owned by Major Julien Blanchard. Images: Waverley Library.